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SUBJECT: COMMERCE SECRETARY GUTIERREZ AND U/S DOBRIANSKY
SEPTEMBER 23 MEETING ON CUBA WITH EU

Classified By: EUR/ERA ACTING DIRECTOR N. DEAN. REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky and Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez co-hosted a discussion on Cuba with senior EU officials in New York on September 23, on the margins of this year's UNGA. Discussion focused on hurricane relief assistance and developments on the EU Benchmarks established in June. Dobriansky and Gutierrez urged the Europeans to continue coordinating among themselves and with the U.S. in supporting Cuban civil society's demands for greater freedom. End summary.

Hurricane Relief

¶2. (SBU) Secretary Gutierrez briefed the group on the U.S. offers of aid to Cuba in the wake of the recent hurricanes, noting that our goals were both to meet the urgent humanitarian needs, and to demonstrate U.S. solidarity with the Cuban people. The most recent offer (made September 19) was awaiting a response from the Cubans, and included shipments of building materials (an item Cuba has asked to purchase on credit). In response to questions on the ability of Cuba to buy products from the U.S., Gutierrez emphasized that the U.S. offer of assistance was unprecedented and without conditions. Although Cuba can and indeed does buy agricultural products from the U.S. (i.e. food and lumber) on a cash basis, the U.S. had made a substantial, unconditional offer to donate the materials directly to the Cuban government.

¶3. (SBU) Slovakian FM Kubis applauded U.S. efforts to reach out to Cuba and confirmed Slovakia had contacted the GOC bi-laterally. Kubis suggested that EU countries with good relations with Cuba (e.g. Spain) might assist in funneling aid into Cuba, and also suggested they work with NGOs and the UN. Polish Under Secretary Schnepf said that the GOC had only accepted hurricane aid from Spain and Belgium to date, despite offers from several other EU countries. Hungarian State Secretary Varkonyi reported the same. EU Commission Director General Manservisi acknowledged that the Cubans had yet to respond to the EU offer of assistance, but still held out hope that the government would accept the aid, and said the Commission remained in touch with the Cuban authorities to discuss needs on the island.

¶4. (SBU) When asked if the U.S. would consider lifting the embargo, Gutierrez restated the importance of separating policy from humanitarian aid. With respect to the extent of the damage, Gutierrez noted the U.S. lacked tangible facts on the ground, and asked that the U.S. and European partners share information provided by credible assessments. Dobriansky added that it would also be worthwhile to coordinate relief efforts among the various diplomatic missions in Havana.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Vimont asked if others had noticed the contrast in public appearances between Fidel and Raul Castro during the hurricane aftermath. Vimont wondered how people perceived the difference. Secretary Gutierrez speculated on the limited public appearances by Raul Castro and suggested it was a new experience for the Cuban people.

EU Benchmarks

¶6. (SBU) EU Commission DG for Development Stefan Manservisi confirmed that the GOC has agreed to accept a dialogue on all political issues. Although the EU has not set the structural agenda, Manservisi hoped there would be a ministerial level meeting before the end of the year, so that the benchmarks could be evaluated on schedule in June 2009. According to Manservisi, the goals of the dialogue are to foment the political discussions at the ministerial level, and to start developmental cooperation with the GOC. The Commission is scheduled to meet again with the Cuban government in Havana next month.

¶7. (C) However, French Ambassador Vimont cautioned that a Ministerial may not be possible during the current French EU Presidency. He cited two concerns - first, the Cubans have proposed a series of principles as a framework for moving forward with the dialogue, in contrast to the EU proposal to

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pursue low profile, practical issues. Secondly, the GOC has delayed the process by responding slowly to the initial offer for dialogue, and to other EU overtures.

¶8. (C) Danish State Secretary Federspiel noted the need for human rights to be at the center of the political dialogue, and reiterated the council's decision to have a two track policy that engaged Cuban civil society in addition to the government. He emphasized that EU members needed to be free to talk to NGOs and other members of civil society. A/S Kramer stated he was heartened to hear human rights would be central to discussions, and urged the EU to keep all human rights issues -- including repression of journalists, political prisoners, and ICRC visits -- on the table to avoid allowing the GOC to "cherry pick" issues.

¶9. (C) U/S Dobriansky suggested that, in terms of practical matters where the U.S. and EU could coordinate, there is an opportunity to coordinate through our missions in Havana to provide civil society with unfettered access to the internet.

Gutierrez and Dobriansky both thanked the group for their continued engagement on Cuban human rights, and urged they continue to spotlight abuses, noting that the international outcry on the arrest of popular musician Gorky Avila helped lead to his release.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) The high level discussion afforded an opportunity to brief the EU on US efforts to provide hurricane relief to the Cuban people and offered insight on potential dividing lines among the EU as they engage the Cubans on political dialogue. End Comment.

¶11. (SBU) Participants: USG: Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez, U/S Paula Dobriansky, A/S David Kramer, CAFC Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry, EUR/ERA Office Director Bill Lucas, Commerce Advisor Sean Reilly, G Senior Advisor Joaquin Ferrao, and EUR/ERA Elizabeth Konick (notetaker).

¶12. (SBU) Participants: EU: Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Jan Kohout, Danish State Secretary Ulrik Federspiel, EU Commission Director General Stefano Manservisi, French Ambassador Pierre Vimont, Finnish Director General Pilvi-Sisko Vierros, Greek Ambassador Alexandros P. Mallias, Hungarian

State Secretary Lszl Vrkonyi, Latvian Under Secretary
Edgars Skuja, Luxembourg Political Director Stephan Muller,
Malta Political Director John Inguanez, Polish Under
Secretary Ryszard Schnepf, Romanian Perm. Rep. To the U.N.
Simona-Mirela Miculescu, Slovenian Director General Anita
Pipan, Slovak Foreign Minister Jan Kubis, Slovak Advisor (to
the PM) Pavol Hamzik, and Swedish Director General Bjorn
Lyrvall.
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